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ROSA'S LAW ADVOCATES FOR KINDER WORDS

November 23, 2009 by cpehrson

By the CPD Consumer Advisory Council members

"Words have the power to both destroy and heal. When words are both true and kind, they can change our world." (Buddha)

The words that have been used through the ages to refer to people with cognitive disabilities have often been less than kind, and have usually had a negative connotation. Words such as retard, dumbbell, idiot, and others leave a bad taste in our mouths and have a direct impact on the attitude that others have towards those with cognitive disabilities. Other words that have attempted to be kinder are often seen as offensive to individuals with cognitive disabilities and their family members. Words like mentally impaired, intellectually disabled, handicapped, differentially-abled, and even special needs.

Presently, more than 6 million people have been diagnosed with cognitive disabilities in this country. A bill is now being introduced to Congress to strike the term "mentally retarded" or "mental retardation" from federal use and to substitute the words "intellectual disabilities." The bill is called "Rosa's Law," and is named for Rosa Marcellino, an 8-year-old girl with Down syndrome, whose 14-year-old brother spoke to Maryland legislators recently about using "words that are hurtful."

Mark Twain has said, "The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug."

We have an opportunity now to help chose the "right words" to use to refer to someone with intellectual disabilities. We have an opportunity to change the way that people think about people with intellectual disabilities, by using kinder, more thoughtful words. Buddha said, "Whatever words we utter should be chosen with care, for people will hear them and be influenced by them for good or ill."

The Consumer Advisory Council at the CPD supports the use of kinder, more thoughtful words. We urge others to advocate for Rosa's Law and change the words used in federal language.

To read more about advocacy for Rosa's Law, visit the AUCD website.